

In the fall of 2016, right-wing intellectual—and future Trump administration bureaucrat—Michael Anton pseudonymously published an essay titled “The Flight 93 Election”. In it, he uses the dilemma that passengers on the ill-fated United Airlines Flight 93 faced as an analogy for how he viewed the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election:

2016 is the Flight 93 election: charge the cockpit or you die. You may die anyway. You—or the leader of your party—may make it into the cockpit and not know how to fly or land the plane. There are no guarantees.

Except one: if you don’t try, death is certain. To compound the metaphor: a Hillary Clinton presidency is Russian Roulette with a semi-auto. With Trump, at least you can spin the cylinder and take your chances.

While this analogy may seem—and seemed to many commentators at the time—hyperbolic and histrionic, I think that the essay's analogy can be

applied, to a certain extent, to the election Canada is facing at the present moment.

As Pierre Poilievre has bluntly put it, “Canada is broken”.

Ten years ago, our GDP per capita and average income were roughly on par with the United States. Now, the average income in Canada is similar to the average in impoverished U.S. states such as Kentucky and Mississippi, while GDP per capita has stayed stagnant over the past decade.

Canada’s national debt has doubled since 2015, and we now spend almost as much on interest payments servicing that debt (\$46.5 billion) as we do on healthcare transfers to the provinces (\$49.4 billion).

Our per capita violent and property crime rates are higher than those of the United States, a fact that feels wild and inconceivable considering the United States’ reputation for violence and Canada’s reputation as a bastion of safety and law and order.

Virulent pro-terror mobs have become a common feature in Canadian cities, and serve as a blunt reminder of the consequences of decaying social trust and the loss of a social fabric previously taken for granted.

We have the world's most permissive euthanasia system, MAiD, that has killed 60,000 people since its introduction and is the 5th leading cause of death in the country.

China interfered in our last federal election, interfered in nomination races, and has set up "police stations" on Canadian soil.

To anyone remotely familiar with Canada's current predicament, the recitation of these facts may seem redundant or even asinine, for they have been repeated *ad nauseam* by countless others in recent months and years—yet a continuation of Liberal governance could add fresh horrors to the mix.

Despite Mark Carney's status as a supposedly centrist central banker, he is promising to add an additional \$130 billion to the national debt over the next four years.

The revival of the Online Harms Act, which surely follows the re-election of this government, will lead to the implementation of a draconian censorship regime surrounding content uploaded to the internet. Arrests for wrongthink are likely.

And, based on Brookfield Asset Management taking out a \$176 million loan from the CCP and Carney's reluctance to fire Paul Chiang, China—in all likelihood—will become more aggressive and brazen in the ways that it interferes with our political system.

If Canadians can't be roused from their stupor to vote against a government as disastrous as the current one, I see a bleak future ahead for Canada.

The word “existential” may be grossly overused nowadays, but I think it fully applies to the stakes of the election we find ourselves in the midst of. If the status quo continues, the damage that will continue to pile up may be irreparable.

Yet there are limitations to this analogy.

Michael Anton spends the bulk of the “Flight 93 Election” essay excoriating the conservative establishment for being an ineffectual counter to an increasingly militant left.

Indeed, the essay’s central thesis is that mainline, establishment conservatives should throw aside their reservations about Donald Trump and embrace him, as he is a paradigm-shifting figure who can reverse American politics’ slow leftward drift.

As far as this analogy goes, Mark Carney may well be our Hillary Clinton—but, despite what the Liberals and the CBC want you to believe, Pierre Poilievre is not analogous to Donald Trump. In fact, he is the exact sort of mainline, establishment conservative that Michael Anton castigates.

“But but but he’s a mean and angry populist who uses simplistic slogans.”

Yes, Poilievre uses one-liners and catchy slogans. He appeals to disaffected working-class people. But the similarities with Trump end there.

At heart, Poilievre is the campus conservative nerd. He's Alex P. Keaton from *Family Ties*. His intellectual foundations are Ayn Rand, George Will, William F. Buckley Jr., and Milton Friedman. In university, he was the kid who would show up to your political science tutorial wearing a bow tie and carrying a briefcase.

When it comes to Trump, it is unclear whether he has any clear and consistent intellectual foundations, despite the efforts of some to create post-hoc intellectual rationalizations for his policies.

Poilievre's political project is formed off of a core set of principles that he has stayed remarkably consistent in following throughout the entirety of his political career—limited government, balanced budgets, low taxes, and personal liberties.

This stands in stark contrast to Donald Trump, whose political positions are almost entirely incoherent and fluid, save for a handful of core issues—immigration, foreign policy, and trade—on which he bucks the neoconservative orthodoxy that Poilievre champions.

Poillievre has been in politics for almost the entirety of his adult life, while Trump was over the age of 70 when he first assumed political office.

And while Poillievre may be a fiscal libertarian, he is far from an ideologue when it comes to social issues.

Poillievre supports gay marriage, abortion, and relatively high levels of immigration. He has stated that he wouldn't re-criminalize euthanasia and marijuana. When it comes to his personal life, his adoptive father is gay and his wife is the daughter of a Venezuelan immigrant.

He embraces a form of blank slate civic nationalism that only asks of immigrants that they refrain from importing foreign conflicts:

“Bring your culture, bring your traditions, bring your family, but do not bring foreign conflicts onto our streets.”

“Ours is a nationalism not based on birthplace, bloodlines, or background. Whether your name is Martin or Muhammad, Poillievre or Patel, anyone from anywhere can come here to do anything. We will

treat all of our people, regardless of race, as Canadians and Canadians first, with no hyphens.”

Doesn't sound very Trumpian to me.

If Poilievre loses this election, I suspect he will be remembered as the last gasp of a certain sort of reformist neoconservatism that has long dominated Canada's right-of-center political scene. The last bowtie-wearing neocon, if you will.

This type of politics is generally cautious and moderate, happy to pursue incrementalist economic reforms while maintaining a stiff indifference towards social issues—or indeed anything that reeks of controversy.

Politicians who profess to follow this ideology may be slightly right-of-center, but they are still well within Canada's narrow Overton Window of acceptable political discourse.

Poilievre may be considered hard-right by some, but all of his ideas are still within the Canadian Overton Window. He is fundamentally not—and I don't think he is capable of being—a paradigm-shifting and transformational character like Trump.

However, in the event of the Liberals being re-elected—an event that, it is important to remind readers, is likely but far from inevitable—it would not surprise me if a Canadian politician who is actually analogous to Trump rises to prominence.

Who that person will be, and what political vehicle they will use for their ascent, though, remains to be determined.

Will Maxime Bernier and the PPC finally gain ground after years in the political wilderness in a situation similar to the rise of the Reform Party in the UK? Knowing what I know about Bernier, it seems implausible. But who knows.

Or will our hypothetical Maple Syrup Trump win the Conservative leadership in the event of a Poilievre resignation? And who would that person be?

All of this is still—and will remain for a while—completely up in the air. One thing, however, is for certain: if Carney's Liberals are re-elected, the "Flight 93 Election" analogy will much more straightforwardly apply to the following election than the one we are currently in.